

White Mulberry

Morus alba L.

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Although native to China, the white mulberry (also known as silk or Russian mulberry) was introduced into the southeastern part of our country by the British before the American Revolution. They wanted to use the leaves of the tree to feed silkworms in what they hoped would be a prosperous and profitable silkworm industry. The silk industry failed but the white mulberry became naturalized throughout the southeast.

The white mulberry can grow to 80 feet in height with a rounded crown of spreading branches. It can reach a diameter of 1 to 3 feet. Its bark is brown tinged with red or yellow, thin and shallowly furrowed, with long narrow ridges. Twigs are light brown and slender.

The leaves of the white mulberry are broadly ovate but variable in shape with three main veins from a rounded or notched base. They are coarsely toothed and often variously lobed even on the same plant. Some are un-lobed while others are glove or mitten shaped. The long-stalked leaves are shiny green above and paler and slightly hairy beneath.

The white mulberry is named for the color of its buds, rather than the color of its fruit. The flowers are on short, green, pendulous, nondescript catkins that appear in the axils of the current season's growth and on spurs of older wood. They



are wind pollinated. Mulberry trees are either male or female and sometimes will change from one sex to another.

Although called a mulberry, it actually bears a fruit resembling a large blackberry. White mulberries can produce white, lavender, or black fruit that is generally very sweet but lacking tartness. The fruit ripens in the late spring and is most favored by wild birds, hogs, chickens, and children. Berries can be eaten out of hand

or used to make pies, tarts, and puddings or sweetened and pureed as a sauce. They can also be made into wine and they make an excellent dried fruit. The leaves can be used as a vegetable as well as cattle fodder.

White mulberry is a drought-tolerant species and can be found on poor soil although it prefers a well-drained loam soil. The sapwood is white to yellowish-white and the heartwood is golden brown, darkening after exposure. It is easy to work and finish and is used mainly for hockey sticks, tennis and badminton rackets, racket presses, cricket bats, agricultural implements, and furniture.

Historically all parts of the white mulberry tree (bark, leaves, and fruit) have been used for various folk remedies such as asthma, bronchitis, bug bite, cold, constipation, cough, diarrhea, dropsy, epilepsy, fever, headache, hyperglycemia, hypertension, inflammation, insomnia, melancholy, snakebite, sore throat, tumors, vertigo, and wounds.

The Alabama Champion white mulberry grows in Madison County. It is 47 feet high, has a 54.25 foot crown spread and a circumference of 188.25 inches. Its total point value is 248.8. Johnson County, Missouri, is the home to the National Champion white mulberry. It has a height of 59 feet, a crown spread of 73 feet, and a circumference of 292 inches. Its total point value is 369. 🌳



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